

FACTS ABOUT OLDER ADULTS & MEDICINES

More than 200,000 people die and another 2.2 million are injured each year because of medication-related problems, according to statistics provided by the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists.

Studies show that older adults are the most susceptible to medication-related problems because:

- More than 77% of adults age 65-79 suffer from one or more chronic diseases. The number rises to 85% for those over age 80.
- Adults over 65 take more medications than any other age group, consuming more than 30% of all prescribed medications and 40% of all over-the-counter medications and supplements.
- The frequency of drug adverse reactions increases as the number of drugs prescribed increases.
- The physical changes caused by aging can alter how a body processes and reacts to medications. The liver and kidneys of an aging body may not as easily metabolize medications, and changes in the distribution of fat and muscle can make older adults susceptible to adverse drug reactions.

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- Almost 40% of all adverse drug reactions reported each year involve people over 60 years old, and nearly one-fourth of all nursing home admissions are older people who are unable to take their medications properly.

Key factors contributing to the improper use of prescription medicines among older Americans include:

- Poor communication between older patients and health professionals;
- Taking several medicines, prescription and over-the-counter products, at the same time;
- Seeing more than one physician;
- Discontinuing medication because the patient “feels better” or because drug costs are prohibitive; and
- Inability to follow medication regimens properly.

Older patients should review all their medications (including all prescription, non-prescription medications, herbal medicines and dietary supplements) with their pharmacist or doctor at least once a year or when a new medicine is prescribed or new supplement taken.

Years of training have made your pharmacist the health professional best qualified to help you understand the proper use of prescription and nonprescription drugs. Talk to your pharmacist!

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